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It is a pleasure to be with you to share some ideas that I have.

I have recently returned from Africa; and I am impressed, as never before, with the dependence of people on the land. Our society has almost forgotten how deep this dependence is.

The topics you have discussed the past few days are of national importance -- salinity, 208 water quality management, and Federal land management. It is time that we team up with other conservation groups to maximize our efforts in conservation. I will try to do my part in this by encouraging the groups I meet with to work together to solve mutual problems.

Your program includes subjects of vital importance to the Department of Agriculture. I will touch on these issues, and will include my ideas on the future direction of the watershed program.

The 24th Annual Watershed Congress in Washington on June 21 touched on many of these issues. The Special Study Committee provided food for thought: discussion groups provided additional ideas to improve the program. Tom Hamilton, Chairman of the Special Study Committee, ably summarized these ideas and issued a challenge for us to accomplish needed change. Specific program recommendations are being drafted by the National Association of Conservation Districts (NACD), the Wildlife Management Institute, the Sports Fishing Institute, and others.

On the future direction of 208 water quality management we're partners in this important job of nonpoint source water quality improvement. And we've just begun.

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Remarks of Assistant Secretary of Agriculture M. Rupert Cutler delivered by Mr. Glen Loomis, Coordinator for Land, Air & Water Activities, Office of Environmental Quality Activities before the National Association of Conservation Districts, Southwest Region, Grand Junction, Colorado, September 9, 1977.

Early last month, I met with Tom Jorling, Assistant Administrator for Water and Hazardous Materials in Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), and we discussed at length ideas on how conservation districts, USDA, EPA, and others can tackle our rural water problems as a team. I'm convinced that can be done.

Senator Clark recently introduced S. 1280 which contains some good provisions on how to implement rural water quality programs. Senator Culver offered an amendment to the Farm Bill that calls for an aggressive approach to rural water quality. Your organization is accepting the challenge.

In my view, rural water quality management is built on the following basic principles:

-- A voluntary approach with farmers and ranchers -- one that does not begin with regulating everyone's activities on private property, but which builds on existing working relationships as much as possible. This doesn't preclude regulation for those individuals who refuse to cooperate in the voluntary programs.

-- Economic incentives to landowners comparable to the benefits that accrue to society as a whole -- not just traditional economic benefits, but a broader spectrum; water quality, improved wildlife habitat, aesthetic values, and others.

-- Team effort that will tap the expertise in organizations like yours, in the universities, experiment stations, the Soil Conservation Service and EPA, the Wildlife Management Institute, the Fish and Wildlife Service, the Natural Resources Defense Council, and others.

-- Recognition and accounting of programs on land use -- the use and misuse of our prime farmlands and timberlands. And here we have to realize that USDA's impacts are minimal when compared to decisions made in the private sector. But USDA is identifying all of the nation's prime farmlands to assist city, county, and State governments make wise choices on how land should be used.

Hugh Hammond Bennett once was asked how he sold the idea of soil conservation. He replied, "We decided on four steps ... science, farmer participation, publicity, and congressional relations." I believe this is sound advice even today. Bennett stressed science. Today, conservation tillage reduces erosion by leaving residues on the surface. This preserves soil and water and has a positive impact on water quality. But this practice also provides food and cover for wildlife.

We're now working with EPA to develop a 208 Management Implementation Plan that will begin with a pilot program to find out how best to bring existing programs and expertise together to solve rural water quality problems. This may well be the forerunner of the program recently introduced in the Senate version of the Water Quality Act amendments (P.L. 92-500). This bill will be considered in conference within a few days.

My meetings with Dave Unger, Bob Williams, and others in your organization have been most helpful in formulating our approach to nonpoint pollution.

Salinity -- it's a problem all of you from the Southwest face. You know what happens when your neighbors' fields are "salted out." You know it means lost income, problems with the local bank and, in some cases, complete financial failure.

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The Agricultural Research Service operates a salinity laboratory in Riverside, California, to study the problem. Preliminary research studies indicate we can reduce the "leaching fraction" by as much as three-fold in some areas without salt build-up. We've field-tested some of the new approaches right here in the Grand Valley area with encouraging results.

Most of this area around Grand Junction is underlaid with Mancos shale, which contains pockets of crystalline salt. The irrigation water percolates through these layers and dissolves the salt. The result -- salt loading in the Colorado River. We estimate 600,000 to 700,000 tons of salt a year go into the Colorado system here in the Grand Valley.

A major effort has been launched toward improving irrigation efficiency in the Wellton-Mohawk Unit in Arizona, with one major objective -- to improve water quality through reduced drainage effluents.

This is being done through better scheduling and on-farm water management. We expect the program to reduce salt contribution to the River in this 75,000 acres by some 500,000 tons per year. This cooperative program involves the Soil Conservation Service, the Agricultural Research Service, and the Bureau of Reclamation.

On May 23, the President reemphasized the importance of State and local planning to control water pollution. In his Environmental Message, The President pointed out that the Water Quality Act calls for "controlling water pollution from point and nonpoint sources, such as farms, forestlands, mines, and urban streets," as part of the 208 planning effort.

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You know better than anyone the impact of Federal land use decisions on private landholders. Much of this area's production of food and fiber has resulted from Federal water projects. In addition, many of you rely heavily on the Bureau of Land and Management and Forest Service special-use permits for grazing.

We've been looking at our management policies to insure maximum benefits to all users while maintaining a high-quality resource base.

There are cases where grazing allotments have to be reduced to insure the continued quality of the basic resources. We do this only when there's no other alternative. Drought like you're facing now only aggravates these resource problems. We'll do everything we can to consider the effects this drought has created as we manage the forest lands. But, in some cases we have had no alternative but to require early closure to prevent destruction of the resource base. We will listen to all alternatives, and we need your counsel.

Another area of concern to all of us is energy. With emphasis on coal, public as well as private lands will be mined. The Soil Conservation Service and Forest Service are developing plant species adapted to revegetate mined areas. Working with mining companies, we're trying to restore land to production equal to, or better than, it was before.

I realize that many from the Southwest have concerns about the Administration's water project review. I'll try to address what this Department is doing. I am concerned about some aspects of the P.L. 566 program and have been working with Mel Davis to initiate some changes that we believe will improve the total program. Specifically, we have been looking at the following:

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- Proper program orientation.
- Improved public participation.
- Streamlined watershed planning and evaluation procedures that adequately reflect environmental values.
- Changes in land treatment policies to better protect watershed areas above structural measures.

We've made some progress. On August 8, SCS published revised procedures for implementing the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA); joint guidelines with the Fish and Wildlife Service on Stream Channel Modification and the Environmental Assessment Procedures used during planning and evaluation. These new documents will provide a new focus on environmental quality.

In addition, we're addressing policy changes in these areas:

- A deauthorization process for old, inactive projects.
- Improved evaluation procedures to better integrate economic and environmental issues, with emphasis on developing the necessary capability to evaluate past project impacts.
- Added emphasis on land treatment for solving more of the watershed problems.
- Wetland policy clarification and implementation of new features.
- Channel modification restrictions that maintain the maximum feasible environmental values.

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-- Flood plain management approaches that emphasize non-structural solutions.

-- Improved use and timely preparation of environmental impact statements -- developed as an integral part of planning.

-- Review procedures that take full advantage of commenting agencies' suggestions.

-- Improved public participation at all stages of decisionmaking.

-- Full recognition of prime and unique farmlands in all phases of the program.

I'd like to touch on a few of these items: Lawrence Jahn, Vice-President of the Wildlife Management Institute, addressing the 32nd annual meeting of the Soil Conservation Society, pointed out, "Cost-benefit calculations used in project planning have been misleading ... benefits have been exaggerated, costs minimized, and values important to society ignored." I fully support this concern and am developing evaluation procedures that clearly outline environmental impacts, social consequences, as well as monetary costs and benefits.

Working with the Fish and Wildlife Service, the Natural Resources Defense Council (NRDC), NACD, and others we're developing reasonable channel modification guidelines. We're limiting construction activity proposed in perennial natural streams. I believe we are moving in the right direction. Your organization has been helpful in getting this effort off the ground, and we will look forward to your continued help.

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Of considerable interest to me is public participation. Some planners feel that they get more public participation than they can stand. However, we must continue to encourage public inputs -- not diminish them. Better decisions will result. Public participation isn't a delay. In reality, if we make better decisions in the beginning, we won't be faced with delays in the end.

We're considering alternative ways to test some of our new ideas. Policy evaluation takes time, but we do not plan to spend time talking about needed changes that never are implemented. One approach is to take full advantage of our existing legislative authorities. For example, Titles I and II of the Rural Development Act of 1972 provide authorities for this program that have never been implemented. This approach would, at the very least, show what can be done. It would provide new interest and enthusiasm in the small watershed program, and ensure that the results will be more in tune with the needs of the 1970's.

In summary, I would like to reflect for a moment on the total job ahead -- for your organization -- and what that means to USDA.

The word "conservation" means different things to different people. Conservation in its oldest sense -- and, perhaps, still the predominant definition -- means preserving or keeping intact. We must still look at soil conservation as:

- preventing erosion,
- preventing water quality degradation,
- preventing economic losses when these things happen.

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It is a common mistake to suppose that the only way to
improve the quality of public administration is to make it
more efficient. This is not true. Efficiency is only one
of the many factors which enter into the quality of public
administration. The quality of public administration is
also determined by the honesty of the officials, the
integrity of the system, the responsiveness of the
officials to the needs of the people, and the degree of
public participation in the process of decision-making.

There are many ways in which the quality of public
administration can be improved. One way is to make the
system more efficient. This can be done by streamlining
the process of decision-making, by reducing the number of
bureaucratic layers, and by improving the methods of
collecting and analyzing information. Another way is to
improve the honesty of the officials. This can be done
by strengthening the legal system, by improving the
methods of selecting and promoting officials, and by
improving the methods of disciplining officials who are
found to be dishonest. A third way is to improve the
integrity of the system. This can be done by making
the system more transparent, by making the methods of
collecting and analyzing information more reliable, and
by making the methods of selecting and promoting officials
more fair.

There are many other ways in which the quality of public
administration can be improved. These include: making the
system more responsive to the needs of the people, making
the system more participatory, making the system more
accountable, and making the system more equitable. The
quality of public administration is a complex issue, and
there are many different ways in which it can be improved.

Improving the quality of public administration is a
complex task, and it requires the cooperation of many
different groups and individuals. It is a task that
requires a long-term commitment, and it is a task that
requires a great deal of effort and resources.

Our resources are limited, and they are precious to us all. With your help we'll be able to accomplish our difficult but essential conservation objectives.

Thank you.

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